

The Four and More model

A tool for systematically exploring behavior in complex organizations

V:1[08.25] 

1 Clarify your Context

Pin down where, when, and with whom the behavior happens before interpreting it.

Where:	<hr/>	When:	<hr/>
With whom:	<hr/>		
Observation:	<hr/>		
	<hr/>		

2 Generate Hypotheses

Use Tinbergen's Four Questions, with Sapolsky's timescales, to develop multiple possible explanations.

Mechanism: Immediate triggers (seconds → minutes)

Seconds: What's happening right now? (*meeting dynamics, visible stress, tone, ...*)

Minutes: What just happened? (*email, deadline, leadership ask, ...*)

Possible Mechanism Hypotheses

Quick Tests

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Development (Ontogeny) Learning history (recent → long-term)

Recent: What's happened in recent sprints/months? (*missed deadlines, staffing changes, ...*)

Long-term: What's the team's organizational history? (*layoffs, leadership styles, prior blame, ...*)

Possible Development Hypotheses

Quick Tests

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Function (Adaptive value) What role does this behavior play?

Immediate: What does it solve right now? (*avoid conflict, look busy, ...*)

Ongoing: What relationship or stability does it maintain?

Possible Function Hypotheses

Quick Tests

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Evolution (Phylogeny) Deep or cultural origins

Organizational: What past company norms might shape this? (*startup culture, merger habits, ...*)

Industry/Culture: What broader patterns does it reflect? (*tech norms, client service expectations, ...*)

Possible Evolution Hypotheses

Quick Tests

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3 Set The Aim

Direction of travel, not a fixed goal.

More of _____ and fewer _____

4 Safe to Fail Experiments

Design small probes to test your hypotheses and move toward your aim.

Mechanism Hypothesis:

Experiment:

Why is it safe?

Development Hypothesis:

Experiment:

Why is it safe?

Function Hypothesis:

Experiment:

Why is it safe?

Evolution Hypothesis:

Experiment:

Why is it safe?

5 Review and Iterate

What happened? What did we learn? What's next?

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